

Sermon (6/10/18, Mark 3: 20-35):

As most parents know all too well, parenting is not easy. On the one hand, the joys and rewards are incomparable. Equally so, however, are the challenges.

Until my children were born, for instance, I don't think I really knew what worry was. From that moment on and forevermore, I'm guessing, I will, like most parents, never stop worrying about my children.

I remember a cousin of mine who once told me that he had given up on worrying because his mother did such a good job at it for him.

Parenting is not easy.

There's the challenge of trying to survive on just a few hours of sleep each night.

There's the challenge of trying to meet all the material needs a child requires. After our daughter was born, we made a trip south to introduce her to her southern relatives. For that trip, I was absolutely amazed by how much stuff we needed. At the time, we had a van and I was sure glad we did. We packed it to the brim. It was just unbelievable how much stuff this tiny human being needed!

There's the constant weight of trying to balance family time with all the other obligations we have.

Oh, and we mustn't forget the guilt. No matter how hard one tries to be a good parent, there's always something to feel guilty about – the anger and/or frustration that sometimes gets the better of us, the lack of ability to provide as much as we think we're supposed to, the mistakes we make along the way, causing us to wonder how much therapy it will take for our kids to recover from our faulty parenting.

Over the years, there has been much talk about Christian family values. Well, the challenge of figuring out what those values are can be significant when reading the Bible. Take, for example, Jesus' family.

When they dutifully brought Jesus to the Temple for the ritual of purification, as most faithful families did back then, Mary and Joseph's hearts were cut to the quick by an old priest's words announcing that their child's destiny would be a sword that would pierce their own hearts.

Later, in the only childhood story the Gospels tell about Jesus, we

find a panic-stricken Mary and Joseph looking for their lost son. When they finally find him at the Temple, Jesus coldly rebukes them for being so worried.

And then there's today's passage where Jesus' mother, brothers and sisters come to rescue Jesus because they had heard he had lost his mind. All they wanted to do was bring him home and care for him.

Jesus pretty much writes them off. He looks around at the crowd of people he's with and announces that *they* are now his family - his mother and siblings. Ouch! That had to hurt!

All of this is tough stuff to think about on a day like this when we have the joy of welcoming two children to our congregation by way of baptism. It's a family type celebration as parents bring one of their own to receive this most sacred sacrament. It's a community celebration as we welcome them to our church, pledging our support, care, and love.

Meanwhile, the lectionary gives us a passage like this that feels so confusing and, well, to be frank, just wrong.

What does it mean? What should we think? Is Jesus anti-family?

The Scribes, the God experts of the day, thought Jesus was possessed by some kind of evil demon.

Jesus' family rushed in to save Jesus because they thought he had lost his mind.

Two sets of people who should have known Jesus the best. Two sets of people who should have understood, better than most, what Jesus was up to. What was it that caused them to think that Jesus was possessed by some sort of evil force or that he had simply gone nuts?

If we look at what happened before this in Mark, here's the evidence they presumably used to convince them that Jesus was in a bad way.

While teaching in a synagogue in Capernaum, Jesus came across a man possessed by an evil spirit. Unlike most in that Synagogue, the evil spirit immediately recognized who Jesus was and knew that Jesus had the ability to destroy them. With just a few words, Jesus demanded the evil spirit to come out of the man. Immediately the man was set free. Did you catch that? The man was set free! This man, who had lived with this evil demon for who knows how long, was set free. Surely, only someone

possessed by an evil demon could set another person free, right?

Shortly after that, Jesus finds Simon Peter's Mom deathly ill. Jesus reached out his hand and healed her. News of this healing spread throughout the neighborhood like wildfire. Everyone came rushing to Jesus, hoping to also be healed. Jesus spent the rest of the night curing people's illnesses and casting out more demons. Surely only someone who had gone nuts would do such a thing, right?

After that, there was a leper. You know, the people who had to wear bells to warn others they were coming so they could run as far away from them as possible. Jesus didn't run. The leper, who saw in Jesus what the Scribes and his own family had missed, begged Jesus to heal him because he knew Jesus could. Moved with compassion, Jesus healed him. Surely, only a madman could care about a leper like this, right?

Then there was a paralytic whose friends were so convinced that Jesus could help their paralyzed friend that they dug a hole through the roof of the building that Jesus was teaching in. They lowered their friend through the hole, hoping Jesus would do something and Jesus did. The once paralyzed man picked up his mat and walked away. Surely only someone possessed by evil spirits could set a man free like that, right?

These are the stories leading up to the episode we read today. What's interesting about today's story is that those whom we would be inclined to think knew Jesus best, didn't, and those whom we would be inclined to think understood Jesus the least, recognized something in him that others missed. It was the poor, the estranged, the desperate, the rejected, the suffering, the broken who gathered around him – pushing and shoving their way through the doors of where Jesus was hanging out, scratching and clawing their way through a roof so they could get close to Jesus. These are the folks whom Jesus was with when he looked around and declared, 'you are my family.'

Difficult are the words that Jesus says about his family in this passage. But I think it would be a mistake to think that Jesus had written them off or didn't love them anymore. We also need to remember that it was this same Jesus who, amid blinding pain while on the cross, made sure that his mother, Mary, would be taken care of by the Beloved

Disciple after Jesus was gone.

In a little while, as part of Avery and Olivia's baptism, we will all be asked to commit ourselves to the nurturing of their faith by way of our prayers, care, example, and teaching. Maybe one of the things we need to be mindful of as we do this, is just how hard it is to follow this Jesus, especially when he says and does things that seem more than a little crazy.

In a world where our mantra has become 'us first', Jesus ties a towel around his waist and washes the feet of his disciples, reminding us that serving the other is way more important than being served or being first. Surely, Jesus must be crazy, right?

In a world where materialism has become the measurement we use to prove our superiority and worth, Jesus tells us that if we really want to receive the life that God wants us to have, we must first loosen our grip on all the stuff we tend to hold onto so tightly. Surely, Jesus must have lost his mind, right?

In a world where fear has so gripped our hearts that we're even willing to callously sacrifice our neighbor with cold hearted disregard, Jesus looks around at those whom society is prone to reject and calls them his family. Surely, Jesus doesn't know what it's like to live in the real world, right?

In a world where nations spend more money on weapons of war than on food to feed the hungry and medical care for the ill, Jesus tells Peter and us that all who live by the sword will perish by the sword. Surely, Jesus is dangerously naïve, right?

How quick and easy it is to find ourselves in the company of Jesus' family declaring that Jesus has lost his mind. How incredibly hard it is to be a faith filled parent, to be a faith filled church, to be an extended family of Christ charged to love, care for, teach, and set an example for all the baptized as Christ has charged us to do.

Parenting is tough. So too is it tough to be a part of Jesus' family. The things Jesus does and says seem to verge on insanity sometimes. To faithfully follow this Jesus might sometimes lead others to think that we too are naïve, out of touch, maybe even a little crazy. Yet, given the predicament the world is in today, I wonder if what we really need is a

little more Christlike insanity.

To God alone be all glory! Amen.